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Housekeepers' Chats

8.3 Dept. 10

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NOT FOR PUBLICATION

Subject: Games for Christmas Afternoon. Information about games from The Playground magazine.

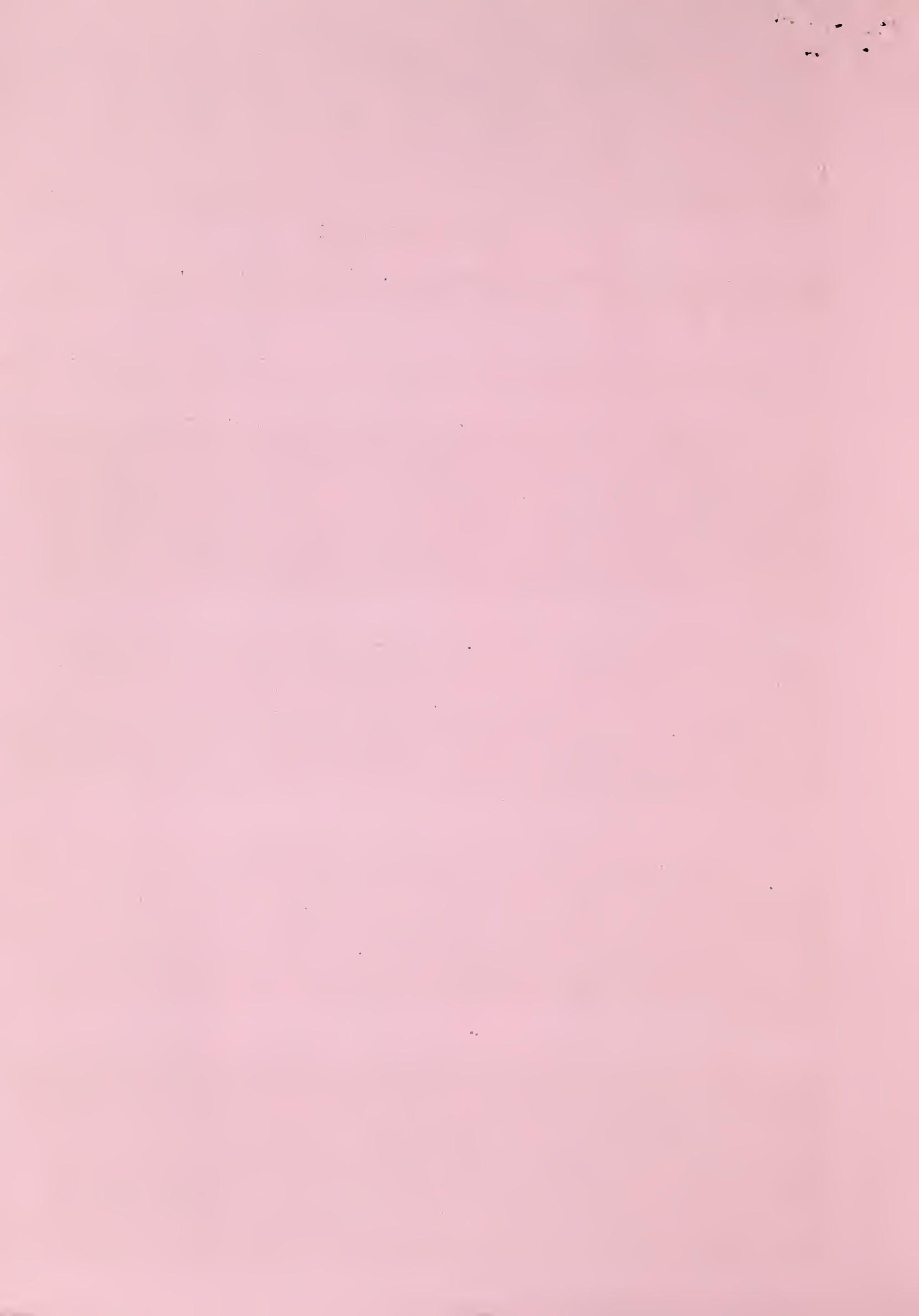
A merry Christmas to each and every one of you and Aunt Sammy's wishes for the best Yuletide ever!

Christmas, it has always seemed to me, is the family day of the year. It is the day when relatives old and young, big and little, get together and are glad they belong to a family. We have all heard a lot in recent years about families breaking up; the bad effects of jazz, automobiles and modern ideas; and the revolt of the younger generation against their elders. So many people have been shaking their heads dolefully, looking solemn, and preaching about the things that are breaking family ties, that I think it is high time more of us talked about the things that are keeping families together.

Christmas is one of them. As long as the tradition of Christmas lasts I am sure American home life will survive. Of all our holidays, Christmas is the one that should unite the family, should make relatives enjoy each other and forget any little annoyances, differences of opinion, and quarrels. It is the great day for family happiness and family fun. Fun is a small word but a very important one, especially on occasions like this. As long as children and parents have plenty of fun together, discord is not likely to arise between them.

The very pleasantest memories of my life center around Christmas when I was a child. There were five youngsters in our family, all near the same age, and we all look back now with the same feeling of gratitude to my mother for creating such a happy day each year for us. The very sound of the word Christmas brings back a flood of glamorous memories to me--wrapping packages and hanging up stockings on Christmas Eve, the dash to the fireplace on Christmas morning to open bulging stockings, dinner with candles and a gay centerpiece on the table, and last, but not least, the games on Christmas afternoon.

My mother was a genius at inventing new games and making over old ones. She could take an old favorite like Blind Man's Buff, Hunt-the-Thimble or Grab-Bag and make it over into the jolliest of Christmas games. Making-over was her specialty, anyway. She could make our old clothes into new garments that looked like the latest models from New York shops, and could convert left-over food into the most delicious new dishes, and she could remodel almost any ancient game successfully so that it seemed brand new and was twice as much fun to play. Our house became a center of merriment on Christmas afternoon for aunts and uncles and cousins from all the country round. Even old Uncle Seth, who was well past seventy, used to insist on



coming each year to join in the games. Nobody played with more enthusiasm than he or laughed harder at the fun. My mother gave us freedom to play what and as we pleased. We could entertain ourselves in the side room with quiet games like checkers, anagrams and authors, or we could join the large group in the living room engaged in more lively diversions. Needless to say, we usually chose the latter, and would have played straight on until bedtime if my mother would have permitted.

If you have no special plans for this afternoon, let me recommend family games. I'll tell you of some simple ones that proved most successful in our home. Most of them are old-fashioned games you all know, dressed up to suit the occasion.

There are charades, for example. Everybody knows that splendid game that provides everyone with a chance to show his dramatic ability and allows the family mimic to get all the appreciation he needs for once. The group divides into two sides and one side acts out, first the separate syllables, and then the whole word, while the other side guesses what the word is. If the answer is guessed in a certain time the other side has a chance to perform. For a large group, no game can provide more merriment. As a wit sharpener, dignity destroyer, or ice breaker, charades can hardly be surpassed. We used to ransack the attic and the whole house for clothes to dress up in. My mother was a most accomplished player. She could take the part of the Grand Duke or the scrub woman with equal perfection and cause her audience to go into spasms of laughter whenever she appeared. At Christmas, we of course, chose words to act out that suited the season. Some that I remember were reindeer, fireplace, merriment, icicle and sleigh-bells.

A new version of the old game of pinning the tail on the donkey was provided by a doll dressed like Santa Claus and fastened to the wall. The player in turn was blindfolded, turned around three times, given a white beard made of cotton. He then tried to pin the whiskers exactly on Santa's chin. The player who put the beard nearest its correct position won the prize.

If you enjoy memory contests, here is one to try. The hostess brings out a huge stocking made of coarse net and filled with all sorts of small articles such as a pencil, an eraser, a paper cutter, a ball, a spoon, a pen, etc. The guests look this over a few minutes to observe the contents. Then it is removed and they are given paper and pencils to write down as many articles as they can remember. A prize goes to the one who has the best memory.

Another pencil and paper diversion is writing a Christmas menu using each letter in the word Christmas to start each word of the menu. Of course, the letters must be used in order. A prize may be given to the one who finishes first or to the one who has the best menu.

Contests and obstacle races are amusing. We used to enjoy nut shelling contests. Two groups stand in two straight lines. Several feet from the head

of the line is a bag of peanuts. The first in line runs up to it when the whistle blows, grabs a peanut, shells and eats it and goes to the end of the line. This continues until all the players have had a turn. The group finishing first wins.

Another game of this variety was called Christmas Ties. The players form in two lines, facing each other. A tie is given to the leader of each line—one red, the other green. At a given signal, each leader puts on his tie and ties it, turns and shakes hands with his neighbor on the right, and then as quickly as possible, unties it and passes it on to the person next to him, who does the same. The line finishing first wins.

Christmas Bells was a favorite with Uncle Seth. We used to play it year after year because he was sure to call for it as soon as he came in the house. Suspend a large wreath in the doorway at a convenient height from the floor with a little bell hidden in it. Prepare snowballs of cotton batting covered with white tissue paper. Each player is provided with three balls, one marked 5, another 10, a third. 20. The players stand about eight feet from the wreath and each in turn tries to throw his balls through it. He is scored according to the number marked on each ball going through the wreath. Any player who accidentally hits the little hidden bell and makes it ring receives an extra 25 on his score.

The younger members of the household usually enjoy a candy hunt. Sometimes the grown-ups find this fun, too. Hide hard candies all over the room. Provide each young player with a little green and red crepe paper baskets, and at the word "Go", let them all start hunting for candies to fill their baskets. The one who has the largest number at the end of ten minutes wins the game.

Another good blindfold game is called Blowing Candles. A small evergreen tree is placed on a table, and covered with small lighted candles. Blindfold the players, one at a time, turn the blindfolded player around three times and allow him to take five steps toward the tree. At this point he takes a big breath and tries to extinguish as many lights as possible.

The puzzle box is much like the old grab bag or fish pond. This my mother used to prepare in advance and bring out when we began to grow tired of the more rough and tumble games. She wrapped up inexpensive articles in boxes of a size and shape that would not give clues to the contents. On a tag attached to each box, she printed a description of the article inside. I remember a few of the tags. A small mirror, for example, done up in a huge box, was labelled, "A place for reflection", a blotter was entitled "An absorbing subject and sixteen candies were described as "Sweet sixteen". The boxes were arranged on a table and the players were given pencils and cards and allowed to write what they thought each box contained from what its title read. The best guesser won. Of course this game took some thought and preparation and for most households might well be saved for occasions when special entertaining was being done and a new form of diversion was needed.

It is time I went to have a look at my roast duck, but before I go I want to tell you about one more good game-- nut target practice. The equip-

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ment is a dish pan, a cake tin and a tin cup and a supply of nuts for each person. Set the cup in the tin, the tin in the pan and the pan in the center of the floor. Then, from a given distance, let each player in turn shoot his supply of nuts, at the bull's eye, which is the tin cup. Every nut that lands in the cup counts five, the tin 2 and the dishpan 1.

Tomorrow we'll discuss using up left-overs.

